

The next best thing to home



J03 Tim Walsh photo

Relaxing and taking time to read a book in a comfortable couch is just one way patrons can enjoy the Naval Station Pearl Harbor Armed Services YMCA's quiet, homey atmosphere.

YMCA ‘auntie’ offers comforts of home to Oahu’s single Sailors

Karen S. Spangler
Assistant Editor

The rather inconspicuous building that sits atop a gently-sloped hill on Pearl Harbor is a “home away from home” for many Sailors.

“I have a son, and I would always want to know that if he went away from home, he would be treated well,” explained Ernie Aubrey who heads the center. “It’s their home,” she said.

Although her official title is program director for the Armed Services YMCA Single Sailor Center, Aubrey is known by everyone as “auntie.” She and her staff of dedicated volunteers man the center seven days a week.

The Single Sailor Center offers a welcoming, caring environment - a place where Sailors can go to socialize, surf the Internet, barbecue on the outdoor grill or cook in the center’s homey kitchen and “talk story” with “Auntie” Ernie.

Doling out motherly advice to her “adopted” brood, they can talk to Auntie Ernie about a myriad of issues.

Aubrey explained that it’s like discussions they would have with their parents - ranging from dating, girlfriends and boyfriends to buying cars. She also provides them with information on resources offered by other agencies. Perhaps most importantly, the center’s “auntie” teaches life skills.

“The front porch is very important,” she said. “We sit out there and talk story.” On the grounds of the center are a variety of local plants and trees which are visited by many birds. “People who sit out there are surprised to see the variety of birds,” she said. In addition to mango and banana trees, a coconut tree and lemon grass, Aubrey has planted tropical flowers, such as red ginger and bromeliads.

“The environment is important,” she said. “I want them to know this island as more than just an expensive place. I want them to know Hawaii - it’s people and culture and how we do things,” she continued.

▼ See ASYMCA B-2



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Sailors take time to relax and unwind together at the Armed Services YMCA's Pearl Harbor facility. Sailors use the facility as their “home away from home” and refer to the center’s director, Ernie Aubrey as “Auntie Ernie.”

Junior Police Officers keep the peace, respect the flag

J02 Daniel J. Calderon
Staff Writer

Amid the traffic slowly navigating the drive, parents escorting their children, and kids rushing to classes around the Pearl Harbor Elementary School campus, there is a small group of students there who are dedicated to keeping their fellow students safe, and who are committed to a daily show of respect for the American flag.

Pearl Harbor Elementary’s Junior Police Officers (JPO) are a group of 24 student volunteers who help monitor traffic flow through the school drive. At 7:55 every school morning, they form a color guard detail and march the American flag to the circle where the school’s flagpole used to stand. The school is waiting for a replacement for the flagpole, which had been removed because of its old age.

“I saw [the JPO] doing the flag one day and I didn’t think they were doing a very good job, so I went in to talk with the principal about it,” said retired Marine Sgt. Maj. Robert Rocha, JPO volunteer coordinator. “She asked me if I’d take over the program and I said yes.”

JPO students who stand morning watch must be at the school no later than 7:30 a.m. The JPOs practice every Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. They also learn about the meaning of the flag, the ceremonies involved, and the history of Pearl Harbor.

“I started out a little bad because I didn’t know what to do, but it’s gotten better,” said 10-year old Mama Fiaseu, a fifth grad-

er at Pearl Harbor Elementary who joined the JPO to represent her school.

“I’ve been doing this since November. It’s not too strict. It’s perfect for us,” she said.

Discipline is an important part of the JPO program for Rocha. He has instituted a Marine Corps-style rank structure for the students and a six-student-per-week watch rotation schedule for safety patrols monitoring traffic in the driveway. The schedule is posted so students can take responsibility for their own watches. Additionally, Rocha uses the program to promote good habits in school and at home.

“They have to keep a ‘C’ average in school,” he said. “If they drop below that, they have a one-quarter probation period to get their average up. If they don’t raise their grades by then, they are off the program.”

In addition, students are not allowed to say “yeah” to Rocha, their teachers or their parents. Rocha has taught them to instead use “Yes sir” or “Yes Ma’am.”

“Mr. Robert [as Rocha is referred to at the school] came in and provided training to the students at a level that I could not provide,” said Mona Smoot, Pearl Harbor Elementary’s vice principal, who handles the school-related aspects and fundraising for the JPO program. “The students have a lot of respect for him and we are really appreciative of his time here.”

“I find it’s an honor to be working at a school named for Pearl Harbor,” said Rocha. “The students and I do our best everyday to respect all of the men and women who died here.”



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Pearl Harbor Elementary School Junior Police Officers prepare for a daily show of respect to the American Flag. Every school day the students parade the flag out to the circle beside the school’s driveway at 7:55 a.m., the exact time the attack on Pearl Harbor began on Dec. 7, 1941.